INTRODUCTION AND COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course introduces students to the formation and implementation of environmental policy, with primary emphasis on the United States. It draws heavily from the discipline of political science in examining environmental politics and how this body of theory translates into public policy. Unlike many policy courses that focus exclusively on either national or international institutions, this course will concentrate on federal, state, and local governance and relations across these levels. In turn, we will frequently compare the respective abilities of state and federal governments to both enact and implement environmental policy, drawing on past experience to consider what the “next generation” of American environmental policy might entail.

*Environmental Politics and Policy* was created prior to the establishment of the Program in the Environment in 2002. It was initially offered through the School of Natural Resources and Environment. At that point, there was a virtual wall dividing SNRE students from those in LSA, making it hard for each group to connect or share classes. So I have really enjoyed the opportunity to work with PitE concentrators and minors through this class, as well as students in the Department of Political Science, the Ford School of Public Policy, and other LSA units. The course has been offered annually over the past decade, although with major changes in content and structure over time. This year is no exception.
The course will define “environment” quite broadly, covering a range of issue areas, as reflected in readings and class deliberations. This will include examination of more conventional issues such as air and water pollution as well as hazardous and nuclear waste. We will also examine the limitations of current strategies in considering possible reforms of the existing regulatory system, exploring challenges such as policy integration across the environmental media of air, land, and water, development of pollution prevention strategies, and shifting from waste management to waste reduction practices. The course will also examine the issue of addressing possible environmental health risks posed by exposure to chemicals and ways in which policy might best address “emerging contaminants.” We will also consider rapidly-evolving controversies, such as policies related to extraction of natural gas and oil from shale via so-called “fracking” processes.

We will also give considerable attention to the issue of climate change. Not only has this become a major environmental concern but this offering of the course coincides with federal efforts to begin to issue “carbon emission permits” to large industrial firms. For the past decade, states have generally dominated the area of climate policy development and, in fact, California began auctioning carbon allowances earlier this year. U.S. House passage of a far-reaching climate bill in June 2009 pushed the issue to the Senate, but that branch’s inability to reach consensus shifted responsibility back to the states, the executive branch, and the courts. In considering climate change strategies, we are forced to confront possible changes in nearly every sector of society, including energy development and use, transportation, and agriculture, as well as issues of mitigation versus adaptation. One particular area of exploration this year will be the political feasibility of pursuing some form of carbon taxation or pricing in future years at either federal or state levels. This idea has been promoted by economists crossing ideological lines for decades as opposed to more traditional regulatory methods but is generally thought to face significant political stumbling blocks.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

All students will be expected to complete three major written assignments during the term and also contribute to class deliberations. Take-home essay questions will be assigned for each of the three major sections of the course. Each will involve completion of an essay of approximately six-to-eight (double-spaced) pages, often in response to a memo that outlines a particular policy situation and asks each student to assume a particular role (such as advisor to the Governor of Michigan or the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). Each essay will be worth 100 points toward the final grade. Essays that are not turned in at the required date will be reduced ten points for each day of delay in submission. Dates for receipt and submission of assignments are set forth in the syllabus.
In addition, 50 points toward the final grade will be based on contribution to classroom discourse. Despite the anticipated class size, there will be considerable opportunities to participate in class deliberation. These will include regular classes as well as a series of special sessions devoted to class debate over essay findings. Evaluation of class participation will be based on quality of discourse and not sheer frequency of engagement. Students who have concerns about participation should feel free to discuss these with the instructor at any point; students who do not anticipate attending on a regular basis or coming prepared for active engagement should withdraw from the class and yield a spot to another student. Material will be frequently presented in class that is not available in assigned readings or any published form. Students are responsible for all material presented in class and assigned in required readings. I will not be posting lecture notes or slides except in special circumstances. Laptop computer use is allowed but I reserve the right to change this policy if it becomes disruptive.

All evaluation and grading will be completed by the instructor; there will not be a graduate student instructor, teaching assistant, or grader employed in this course. The three primary grading criteria that each essay will be measured against include: 1) Presence of a structured argument that responds to the assignment; 2) Ability to include and apply relevant course concepts to the issues at hand; and 3) Ability to advance a compelling case for a particular policy proposal or political analysis. Ninety percent of the total grade will be based on substantive content and the remaining ten percent on stylistic clarity and quality. Students are advised to make the case for their own understanding of the best approach to a particular issue, rather than attempt to assimilate any presumed position of the instructor.

**REQUIRED READINGS**

Required readings should be completed, preferably in the order listed, before each designated session. Most of the readings are from the three required books, supplemented by materials that will be included on our class C-Tools site. A few brief supplemental readings may be distributed prior to the relevant session, usually to add very current information to a particular discussion. One additional book is recommended below for students with little or no prior background on either American government or environmental issues. All required books have been published very recently and so used copies via campus markets are unlikely. Required course books include the following:

--Barry G. Rabe, ed. *Greenhouse Governance: Addressing Climate Change in America* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010). OK, so you are stuck having to buy and read a book edited by the professor. I will donate any royalties from class purchase to any environmentally-focused organization recommended by class consensus. Beyond that, this page-turner will provide an introduction to many facets of
climate change policy in the United States and abroad, including discussion of relevant federal and state institutions and policy options. It was published right after my year as a visiting professor at the University of Virginia’s Miller Center for Public Affairs, when I convened a National Conference on Climate Governance in between the 2008 election and the 2009 inauguration. The book was intended to review many institutional and policy issues at a point where it seemed as if a major federal push into climate policy was plausible. It will be used heavily in the first section of the course, as we consider federal government capacity to address pressing environmental protection issues.

--Michael E. Kraft, Mark Stephan, and Troy D. Abel, Coming Clean: Information Disclosure and Environmental Performance (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011). This book represents the first comprehensive political science analysis of the most significant U.S. environmental information disclosure program: the Toxics Release Inventory. The TRI has been widely studied by scholars from other disciplines since its inception in 1986 but this team of political science scholars devoted a full decade to looking at every possible dimension of this program. This includes a particularly strong focus on why states and firms vary so markedly in their performance measures. The book has already triggered considerable attention and offers recommendation for consideration in other possible disclosure programs such as climate change and environmental issues related to hydraulic fracturing for natural gas and oil. This book will be our primary text for the second unit of the course. Professor Kraft will be visiting the Ford School in early December to give a public lecture related to this book and potential applications to other areas of environmental and energy policy.

--Daniel J. Sherman, Not Here, Not There, Not Anywhere: Politics, Social Movements, and the Disposal of Low-Level Radioactive Waste (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future Press, 2012). Sherman confronts a classic policy question, namely the issue of developing facilities that may convey significant advantages to society but impose considerable costs on communities directly affected. From waste disposal facilities to expanding controversies over the siting of renewable energy facilities, this has become an increasingly salient issue in the United States and around the world. Sherman looks at a range of proposed facilities for “low-level radioactive waste” in the United States. This waste is generated by nuclear power plants but also a wide range of medical research and medical care delivery institutions. As he notes, this has been a near-constant area of struggle for more than three decades and illustrates many of the challenges in moving ahead with this type of siting. This will be the primary book for the final third of the course. Professor Sherman will give a public lecture on the latest developments in this case during the upcoming Winter Term.
Optional but Recommended for Students with Little Prior Experience in American Government OR Environmental Issues

--Norman J. Vig and Michael E. Kraft, eds., Environmental Policy: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century, 8th edition (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2013). This is the latest version of an edited collection that has served as the most used and cited environmental politics and policy text of the past two decades. It represents contributions from a very diverse group of scholars who have been asked to analyze evolving trends in their particular area of expertise. When I visit the offices of environmental policy professionals around the world, I frequently see some edition of this book on the shelves. Please be certain to obtain the 8th edition with a 2013 publication date. This is about as current and accurate a core text as you will ever find. It will not be required but could be very useful for students who lack prior coursework in the areas addressed by the course as well as those with career aspirations related to environmental policy.

SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

Section One: POLICY FROM THE TOP-DOWN: THE FEDERAL ROLE AND THE ISSUE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

September 4: Introduction to Environmental Politics and Policy

What are the major successes in American environmental policy over the past generation and what are the greatest challenges for coming decades? How do we begin to think about the role of the political process and governing institutions in influencing environmental quality? How do we begin to approach an issue such as “global climate change” from the perspective of national politics?

September 9 and 11: The Role of Congress and the President in Environmental Policy

Congress was incredibly active on environmental issues in the 1970s and early 1980s but has had enormous difficulty reaching consensus on these matters in more recent times. Are there special aspects of environmental policy that compound the challenge of effective Congressional engagement? Why has it proven so difficult for any Congress to enact climate legislation? How influential are Presidents in this area?


Ryan Lizza, “As the World Burns,” *The New Yorker* (October 11, 2010).

**September 16 and 18: Environmental Policy Formation**

*Numerous factors can deter the enactment of environmental policy, at any level of government. We will review competing theories of policy formation and agenda setting to consider what forces tend to converge when a new policy is enacted. Is some kind of environmental disaster essential to drive the development of a new policy, such as the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico? How influential is public belief and concern in driving policy formation? What role do policy ideas play and how can various policy options be framed to build political support?*


Theda Skocpol, “Naming the Problem: What It Will Take to Counter Extremism and Engage Americans in the Fight against Global Warming?” Harvard University, unpublished manuscript (February 2013): 1-20.

**September 23, 25, and 30: The Politics of Carbon Taxes, Carbon Cap-and-Trade, and Carbon Pricing (Receive first take-home assignment on September 23.)**

*Taxing the carbon content of fossil fuels has long been discussed as a potentially cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas and conventional air emissions. It is used widely in a number of nations but has had only limited impact thus far in the United States. At the same time, other so-called excise taxes, such as those placed on tobacco, have been*
raised steadily to try to deter consumption. Are carbon taxes politically feasible in the coming decades in the United States? Are they more feasible in another form, such as fees, taxation on energy as it is removed from below the surface, or some variation of cap-and-trade?


**October 2: When Policy Happens: Enacting the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments**

*Perhaps the most far-reaching federal environmental legislation of the past quarter-century was the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, approved by a Democratic Congress and a Republican President (George H.W. Bush). This bill embraced the idea of emissions trading both to build political support and find a more cost-effective way to reduce emissions. So what exactly happened in this case? Is it still possible politically to build large support for policy compromises? And why do we keep talking about “grand bargains” like the 1986 Tax Reform Act?*


**October 7 and 9: Class Debates over First Paper Assignments. All papers due at the beginning of the October 7 session.**

**October 14: Fall Break. No class.**

*Good reading focus for this break would be early chapters of Kraft, Stephan, Abel book, Coming Clean, as much of this is assigned in coming weeks.*
SECTION TWO: REGULATING THE ENVIRONMENT AMID UNCERTAINTY AND THE BOLD-NEW-WORLD OF HYDRAULIC FRACTURING FOR SHALE GAS AND OIL

October 16 and 21: The Evolving State Government Role in Environmental Policy

State governments have been unexpectedly active players in climate change policy, developing a wide range of policies either unilaterally or in collaboration with neighbors. What motivates some states—but not others—to take unilateral action? Why have so many states proven more capable of passing climate legislation than Congress? How does a mixture of state policy responses influence federal ability to engage the issue? How might states even begin to develop a policy response to the issue of hydraulic fracturing for natural gas from shale deposits?


October 23 and 28: Managing Environmental Business: The Evolution of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and State Environmental Agencies

Many models have been proposed for establishing a lead agency to oversee environmental policy in the U.S. and at the state level. The U.S. EPA was created over forty years ago through a series of political compromises and has never really been reformed. How do we evaluate the EPA’s “performance” and have its efforts improved environmental quality? How do existing agencies address “new” issues such as climate change and hydraulic fracturing? Are state government agencies more or less effective than ones at the federal level?


October 30 and November 4: Chemical Disclosure and the Public Right-to-Know
(Receive second take-home assignment on November 4)

There has been a dramatic expansion in recent years of proposals to make available to the general public information about environmental contamination risks and quality trends. The most prominent example of this is the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI), which discloses annually the release rates of hundreds of chemicals throughout the United States. Can information disclosure be used to “nudge” behaviors, essentially using information to motivate behavioral changes and thereby improve environmental quality? What does the public have a right-to-know about the chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing and what should remain a trade secret?

Kraft, Stephan, and Abel, Coming Clean, ch. 3, pp. 83-98 of ch. 4, and ch. 5.


November 6 and 11: The Next State Environmental Frontier: Developing Policy on Hydraulic Fracturing for Shale Gas and Oil

The rapid expansion of hydraulic fracturing techniques to secure natural gas and oil from shale deposits has begun to raise a wide range of energy and environmental policy issues. Most of these are concentrated at the state and local government levels. How do states maximize the economic benefits from shale sources while minimizing environmental risks? Are states relying on existing energy policies or starting from scratch?


Kraft, Stephan, Abel, *Coming Clean*, ch. 7.

**November 13 and 18: Class Debate over Second Paper Assignments (All essays are due at the beginning of the November 13 session)**

**Section Three: POLICY FROM THE BOTTOM-UP: SITING CONTROVERSIAL FACILITIES AND THE POLITICS OF LAND-USE**

**November 20 and 25: Imposing Losses and Siting Environmental Facilities**

*One of the most challenging environmental issues is where to locate facilities that may serve a general public good but literally must be located in someone’s backyard. When waste dumps and old industrial facilities are cleaned up, where should the waste go? How does one weigh economic efficiencies versus equity considerations? This issue is familiar in waste management but also extends to other areas, including the siting of renewable electricity equipment such as wind turbines, solar farms, hydro dams, and transmission lines. Looking ahead, how do we best approach such siting issues?*


**November 27: No class due to upcoming Thanksgiving Holiday. Safe travels.**

**December 2: Direct Democracy and Public Participation (Receive final take-home assignment)**

*From bottle bills to renewable energy mandates, state and local governments have increasingly turned to ballot propositions and other methods of public participation to give the citizenry direct input into the formation of environmental policy. How do these*
processes work and do they offer viable ways to incorporate public preferences into environmental policy? Can they address concerns about environmental justice? Are there any lessons from Michigan’s November 2012 ballot proposition on renewable energy?

Sherman, *Not Here, Not There, Not Anywhere*, chs. 3-4.


**December 4 and 9: Siting Nuclear Power Plants and Waste Facilities**

Nuclear power has long had strong proponents in the United States, internationally and even on the UM campus. But is it possible to find ways to safely manage wastes from nuclear power plants? And is it possible to site new facilities in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster? And what is the latest in the low-level radioactive waste case examined by Sherman?

Sherman, *Not Here, Not There, Not Anywhere*, chs. 5-7.


**December 11:** Submit final essay at the beginning of class session and participate in final class debate.